

# Bard

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# Bard

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Can there be words for the difference?

An edge between a flower

say, or hurt hunting skin.

Where does it hammer to happen?

How does Thor's emblem come

to hang round Christian necks?

Labrys to Hammer to Cross,

a manless cross in the sky —

He's always gone on the symbol

"our faith is in the Resurrection,

look! the empty cross!" —

imagine her saying that.

My blood pressure.

The gates of some other heaven.

The rent or the mortgage.

The pearl nestled in the socket of your throat.

I really mean it.

After every jewel a shadow

leading through human suffering  
hand by hand to the center of the earth.

I love you because you are sudden and red,  
because sparrows go on clustering

(round the foot of the Cross) in snow to catch  
the bird seed falling from the feeder

where big birds perch, the agitation of food.  
All eating is a sin,

it all takes life, no matter how vegan,  
rice weevils die that we may live,

untold massacres of organic harvest  
and we're not even ashamed as we chew

the way we might be when we eat a little lamb.  
Adjust the lens of justice!

See everything differently,  
our only chance is coffee on the terrace

watching skiers sail off into vacancy  
through the pixel wonderland of falling snow.

I wake up every morning and open the curtain  
reading the new light like a letter from the Pope,

the immense authority of the day.  
Blood singing through my ears,

the weird hymns the body knows  
and will never tell the mind,

why should it? the mind is a stranger  
in this soft hotel and soon will be gone.

10 December 2005

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*Glib* – I wrote the word  
then wondered – ice  
to slip on, a word  
to betray what I'm really  
thinking – a pause  
in the wrong place,  
a yellow rose.

10 December 2005

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After all the certainty  
a slick little doubt  
to ease the passage –  
an angel with its  
paws on your heart.

10 XII 05

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So many times of us. Kinds.  
A pennant slung from an oak tree  
as if every living thing  
had a politics, and only I escaped.  
Waveless sea, you are my mother.

In dreams I come close to waking  
*inward*, waking in the doorway  
on the other side of sleep's house,  
walking out bravely  
into *that* morning

that no one living has ever seen.

10 December 2005

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And there's more,  
always more:  
the slim repeating  
we call 'song' –  
who first presumed  
a tune?

10 December 2005



## THE WAY

1.

The shapes of people  
keep telling more and more.

The way. That is what is to be seen:  
each one, each one's way,

the way of them.

What they tell me

and what I know.

2.

The different agonies of what passes,  
the peculiar little pleasures,  
what is touched  
as it passes by.

But what is there, that place  
into which each of them disappears,  
the vortex of being so far away from me?

The flower of confusion  
blossoms in the candid afternoon,  
no penalty, all wound and no pain,

I learned it from my father:  
we are made partly out of sky  
and are most at home when we stare into the distance

10 December 2005

Red Hook

## PLAIN NAMES

What do they mean  
all the books on all my shelves?  
They are my names.  
My genesis. The read  
and the unread alike  
declare me, reveal me,  
like any name  
conceal me.

But what was my plain name  
before I read a word,  
and what would that be like,  
a plain name,  
a name before language?

\*

But language is the breath of the other,  
the smell of her mouth,  
a name before language  
would be a name before you

wouldn't it? Or do you too  
have a plain name of your own?

11 December 2005

## PRAYING BY ROTE

But it is the 'body'  
that needs to pray –

the body, that complex  
of inherited and acquired  
habit patterns –

the Mind is pure.  
Or: the Mind is always praying.

The Mind *is* prayer.

When people tell you Think about the words when you pray  
they may be leading you astray –

Thinking about the words can become thinking about words.

Let the body hum, let the body alone to pray.

11 December 2005

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but the man, this W, wants,  
he *wants*  
to be the Master of the End of Time,  
he doesn't care what happens to the earth  
or to the ordinary children of men and women  
because he was never an ordinary child  
and he knows the earth his father bought him  
with *his* father's money  
will last as long as money does,  
  
and when money is gone  
then god can come and take away the rest.  
No worry, no eco, no Kyoto conscience.  
He wants, and the only thing he hasn't got  
yet is the end of the world,  
he wants to be President when the clouds come in  
and the moon rolls up like an old scroll  
and the devil carries off his own.

11 December 2005

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*to breathe is to be obsolete*

— M. P. Shiel

Then nothing is more than the cloth you wrap around it  
and the floorwalker's carnation smells of frangipani strangely  
and you walk to the end of the aisle among silk neckties  
thinking *cathedral, cathedral* when will I get to heaven.  
How high the nave. And galleries or balconies around it  
level after level, seventh heaven just beginning, all of them with  
gilt acanthus leaves on wrought-iron balustrades my God  
what can we do with money now that smells so wonderful  
as John Wanamaker's organ (many a joke about that) or  
the Thirtieth Street Station's immense Hellenic columns  
o God I need the world so much, now close the hospital.

11 December 2005

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I have carried midnight with me  
all day long, The brittle mind of it  
afraid to commit a thought to word.  
Or touch what would be absent  
in the morning. Weariness of now.  
And this clock has no hands.

11 December 2005

## HEEDING

What it tells me:

I need air

(the voice I listen for  
so many years

explaining

what comes next

from this seed

the whole text

breathlessly

effortlessly grows,

seed or said

something it knows

leaves me

to figure out

its restless certainty

inside the doubt)

go out and breathe.

12 December 2005



= = = = =

But the pretense  
that I am listening  
is listening.

The round Carolingian letters  
I read all night  
(waking to Budapest on tv  
in fog the gallant bridges)

were the words – I understood  
this just now – were writing  
the words I am supposed to live  
out all my life,

each day a translation from its dream.  
*Gleichschaltung* the Nazis said,  
the whole of reality brutally  
realigned every morning to shape,  
the sense of things the dream has left—  
if the truth were known,  
there was no Portugal before last night.

Everything begins again anew.  
Refine the dream and politic the air—  
something slow in me this morning

as if some of me is still back there  
in the Dark Age library  
it seems to please me  
at this moment to  
imagine I remember:

on my monument they'll say of me  
*He lied about his dream until you woke.*

12 December 2005

## TEMPLVM

The north of the sky very dark  
and I don't use 'very' lightly.

The southwest has some pale,  
a flirt of blue that is not there  
when I look straight at it.

Not it. The taste of fresh coffee  
(French roast Mocha) disturbs  
a cavern in the western brain.  
Or skill. There are spaces in there  
no anatomist can tell. Then  
in that cave a sudden surge  
of heavy air shunts to the north—  
it has the look outside they mean  
when they say It looks like snow—  
where 'snow' is a verb, future tense,  
anomalous grammar of the sky.

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Or what *is* the matter with me?

So many pens only one penis.

Neither light nor dark can finally win.

It goes on compromising forever

until we call the compromise a principle

and pray to it and try to heal our lives.

12 December 2005

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Asking the Zodiac questions it behooves the querent  
to listen hard. Then the animals in question (plus  
a man with a pot on his head, a girl cradling a sheaf of corn,  
and one delicate machine) ran squeak or snuffle each  
in their own language, undistracted by language,  
and the querent hears the truth of all that's said.  
Isn't it wonderful to have ears inside your head.

12 December 2005,

Kingston